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ABSTRACT

Open communication among administrators, teachers, and students leads to a more effective learning environment. Teachers who are treated fairly by administrators will pass this sensitivity and humanity on to their relationships with students. Administrators can take a number of steps to establish a communication forum and a school climate that balances the educational program with a measure of humanity. (MLF)

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Tips for Principals from NASSP · November 1984

How To Add the Human Dimension for More Effective Schools

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How To Add the Human Dimension for More Effective Schools

In the wake of recent reports about the condition of education, mutual support from all branches of education is imperative.

One basic strategy that will help schools be more effective is a continuing dialog between teachers and principals. This adds a touch of humanism throughout the school and makes it a more effective climate for learning.

The first step is to establish a communication forum for all staff. By providing such a forum, the principal encourages all personnel to share their opinions, suggestions, frustrations, and problems.

A considerate principal communicates and interprets policies to everyone on staff and maintains a written policy book that explains rules and regulations in detail. The principal also explains any changes in policies and procedures.

Calvin Coolidge once said, "I have never been hurt by anything I didn't say." However, since silence can be interpreted either as giving consent or as silently rebuking, dialog will discourage confrontation and encourage staff input.

Humanizing Academic Programs

The administrator can take several steps to encourage administrator-staff-student dialog:

- Avoid planned regimentation for both students and teachers.
- Schedule parent-teacher conferences at the convenience of teachers as well as parents.
- Keep classroom disruptions to a minimum. Schedule stability, teacher authority, and student needs should be basic goals.
- Allow teachers to use community resources to extend the limits of the classroom beyond the confines of the school.
- Establish a strong inservice program for teachers.
- If possible, provide each teacher with an office where he or she can plan and work—a "home base."
- Recognize staff and student accomplishments. This improves morale and motivates continued excellence. The most successful executives know the value of name recognition and rewards for excellence. Know staff and students by name and show an interest in their accomplishments.
- Develop a good public relations program. The public deserves a reasonably accurate account of the goals and long-range plans of the school and will support programs that reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. Invite the public to visit your school on special occasions such as anniversaries, awards assemblies, sports banquets, and graduations.
- Set up a speakers bureau for staff members to share their knowledge with community members and ask community leaders to speak to student and teacher groups. Public relations is a two-way street—travel both ways.
- Set a good example for students and staff. As role models, principals are placed on the same lofty level as the clergy, physicians, judges, and bank presidents. A principal must always maintain a public image that will be acceptable to the most fastidious parents and taxpayers in the community.
- Attend student and staff activities such as athletic contests, dances, field trips, band concerts, and drama productions. Parents, students, and teachers appreciate the principal's interest in them. In most cases, the sponsors of the activity will be flattered.

Remember: If the administrator treats the teachers fairly, the teachers in turn will pass this sensitivity and humanity on to their relationships with students. This caring relationship then helps students to learn.

"Students, as individuals, cannot be emphasized enough," says Hilmar Wagner in "The Student-Centered Classroom—Let's Not Replace It," (May 1982, *NASSP Bulletin*), "for if they have good concepts of themselves in relation to given classrooms, they will likely improve themselves. Therefore, by being more student-centered the teacher accomplishes a two-fold purpose: helping the students to learn, and helping them to develop as self-fulfilling individuals."

To make teachers feel like a more vital part of education, administrators must involve them in the education process. James J. Lynch, coordinator at Bensalem (Pa.) High School, suggests that teachers be involved in activities besides the teaching process, including after-school activities such as clubs and sports.

"The humanistic teacher must demonstrate a genuine concern for the welfare and progress of all students," Lynch asserts. "The humanistic teacher must also possess the quality of fairness . . . in the handling of students and parents. . . ."

Lynch also recommends that the humanistic

teacher be full of vitality for the long hours of involvement in education (December 1981 *NASSP Bulletin*).

The administrator can promote this involvement by taking an interest in teachers and their interests.

Having the Human Touch

Theodore Sizer in the April 15, 1984 *New York Times Spring Survey of Education*, wrote "In effective schools . . . the key is the people, not the program. . . . The agenda for effectiveness, then, should focus primarily on the human dimensions—the teachers and principals. . . ."

Some of the problems in secondary school administration are not the result of a lack of competency, but the result of a lack of human touch—trust, respect, kindness, tact, fairness, and restraint. Administrators need to show an interest in what others think and do, no matter how trivial they may seem.

The principal must establish a school climate in which the rigorous professional/academic program is balanced with a measure of humanity.

How can the principal do this?

- The principal with the human touch is a good listener; but listening alone is not enough, it also requires hearing and doing.
- The humane principal is a rational observer who sees what is going on and constantly plans for improvement.
- The humane principal must also be able to communicate well with staff members. But, he or she must also be flexible enough to encourage staff initiatives and growth.
- Capable principals are creative and innovative, but they are also accountable. Untested ideas have a way of haunting the unwary.
- Principals with the human touch make decisions based on scholarly inquiry and research, but they also use common sense and the expertise of staff members. If a decision turns out to be a wrong one, the humane principal does not point an accusing finger at a staff member, absolving him or herself of the blame.
- Humane principals are well-organized and enthusiastic about their schools.
- The human dimension requires strong leadership skills; but more importantly, it requires sensitivity to teacher and student needs. Caring principals stand ready to help teachers solve the human equation in dealing with students but they do not second guess staff members' solutions any more than they like to be second guessed.
- Considerate principals allow staff members autonomy in their respective classrooms by helping them maintain a strong self-concept. Teachers must not only have academic freedom, but also the freedom to develop style, versatility, and stability.

Lynch asserts, ". . . the teacher's humanistic act in the classroom promotes student interest. The word act is used loosely and is intended to be almost theatrical. As the teacher's primary job is to present the material, the better the act the greater is the acceptance of the material by the students."

- Understanding principals try to anticipate problems before they get out of hand, but they also remember that timing and team effort are important in solving most problems.

When a principal can manage a school in such a manner that the staff and students are not intimidated; when self-motivation and self-discipline characterize the daily agenda of the entire school; and when each employee contributes his or her fair share to the overall education effort, the school is on its way to establishing a school climate that is right for effective learning. Then, defensive school leadership will be a thing of the past.

Effective principals never forget that the most important responsibility is the welfare and education of the youth.

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